



Exploring the online world

How have Time to Shine projects helped older people to connect using digital technology?

Time to Shine Report
September 2020

Introduction

Research shows (ONS Internet Users UK, 2019) that whilst the proportion of users is increasing, older people are still less likely to use the internet than their younger counterparts. There are forms of technology older people might be able to use to help them connect locally and further afield. There are also many services people are required to access on-line, for example bidding for local authority housing requires online access, thus supporting older people to use the technology increases their independence. Isolation since Covid-19 has been a catalyst for many potential users.



Evidence

Time to Shine has funded over 100 projects (2015-2020). Time to Shine initially commissioned specific projects to work on digital inclusion. Other Time to Shine projects used digital technology as an integral part of what they did, and several projects have continued to do this. Since 2018 the Leeds City Council project 100% Digital Leeds, which aims to increase digital access for the whole population, has also supported older people's organisations to help them to get their members online. They have been a key supporter of Time to Shine projects involved since then.

This report is drawn from information gathered by the Digital Angels project, a local evaluator case study on the Digital Angels project, reports from The Postcard Café, and Postcard Community projects, and further case studies and stories which have been drawn from Time to Shine projects since 2018.

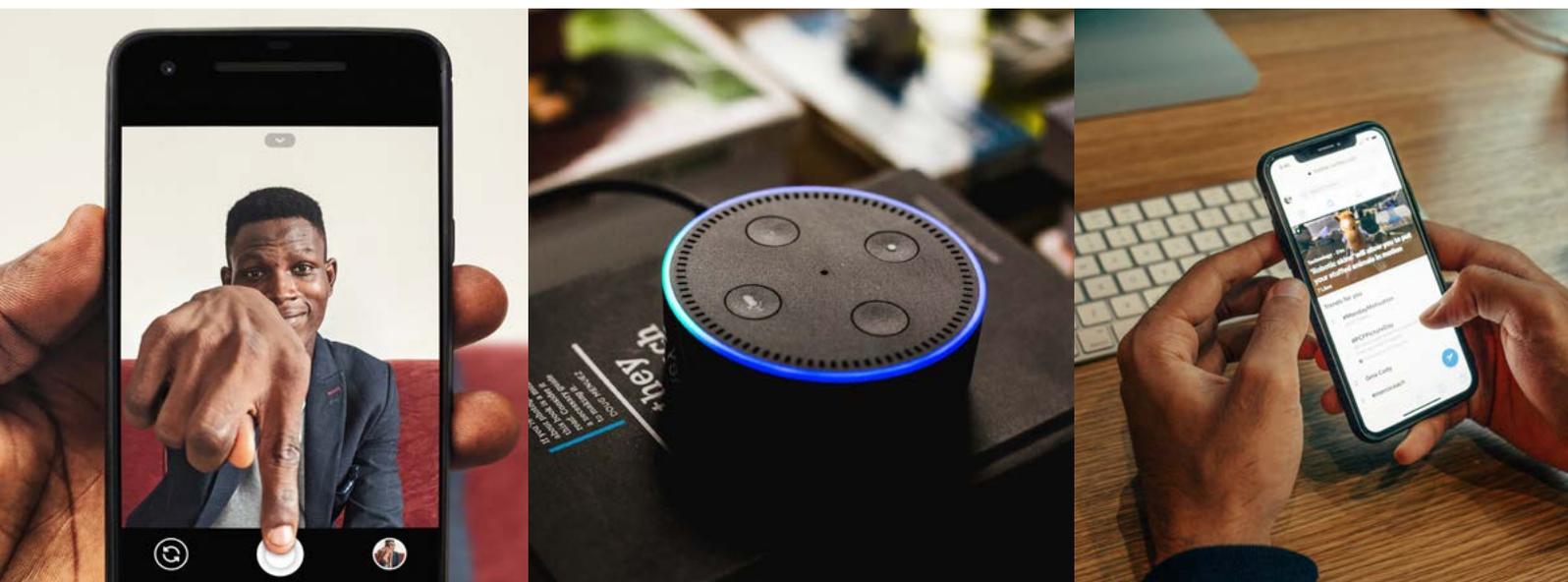
The audience for this report is all organisations that support older people. We recognise not everyone wants to go online, but as interactive technology improves and many more services move online, many more older people will have a motivation to access the internet. This information will enable organisations to support people effectively.

Insight from Time to Shine Delivery partners

Evidence across the range of projects demonstrates the importance of finding the motivation for that individual. Only once individuals know why they 'need' to use the internet will you be able to help those individuals take the next step.

Like all other activities, it helps to be person-centred. Some people enjoy learning in a group with classes and can use that group to form a support network, but for many people one-to-one work is more appropriate as they have specific interests, or need particular equipment.

It is rarely a quick fix, and if a project is unable to provide ongoing support it is good to be able to identify help from elsewhere such as a volunteer, a mentor or a carer. This sort of learning often takes a lot of reinforcement.



What did Time to Shine projects with funding for digital activity do?

Digital Angels at Age UK Leeds

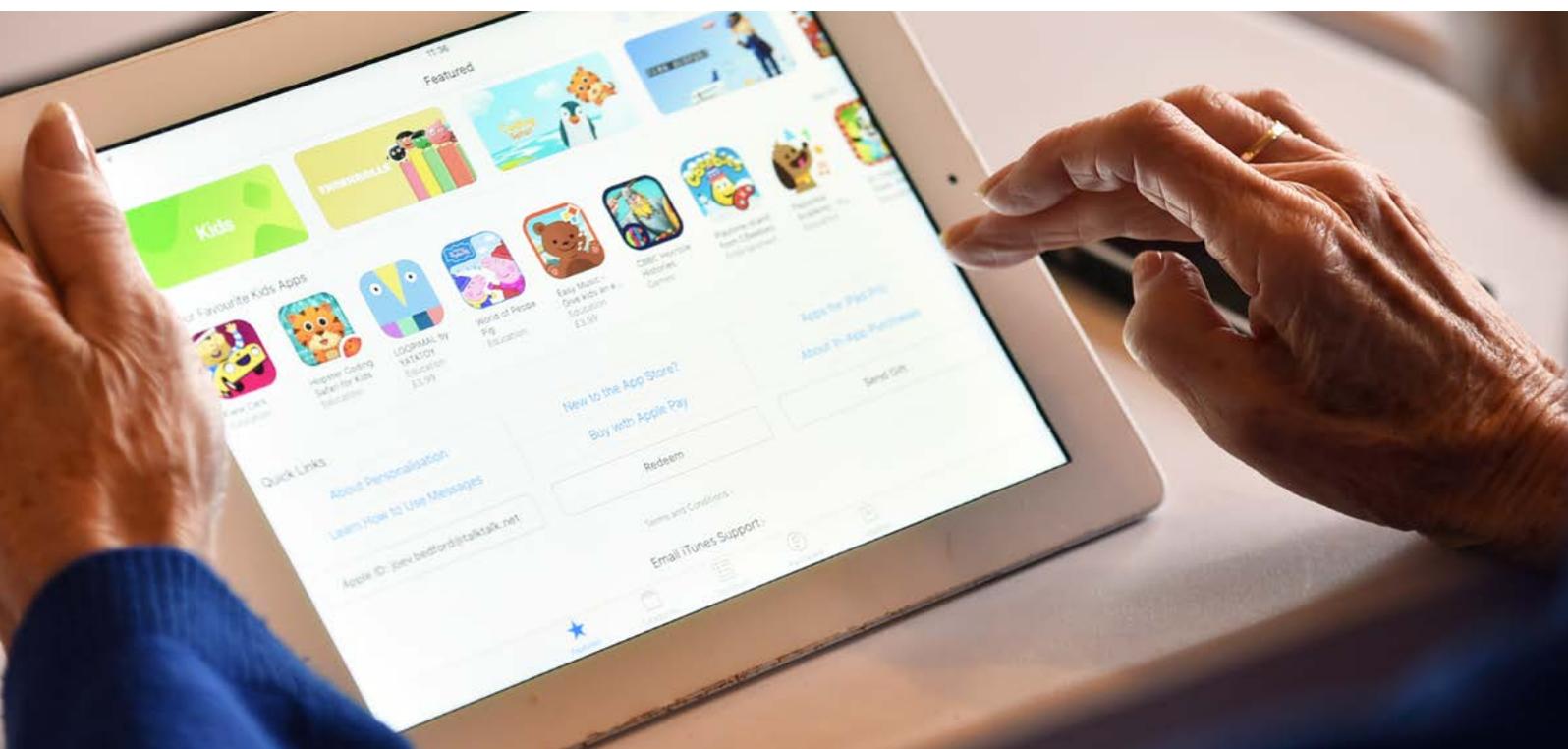
It supported older people to get on-line across South Leeds. It did this through a mixture of group work and one-to-one sessions. Digital Angels proved useful not just for new users, but also for those who had used a computer before; they might need to update their skills or be re-enabled to use equipment because of a new health condition or impairment. To ensure people who struggled to get outside could benefit, the project team also felt that running a digital inclusion project that was not classroom based was particularly important.

Digital Angels:

- worked one-to-one in people's own homes for those who were unable to get out
- ran one-off "techy tea parties" in libraries and community venues to engage people
- ran short courses with community-based partner organisations to reach a wider range of people

Some socially isolated people were helped to sustain or re-engage contact with family members. Others were able to improve their wellbeing by pursuing previous interests online, or access health information. Challenges included participants who were unable to practice between sessions because of lack of access to the internet (no Wi-Fi), or lack of confidence with no time from others to support their efforts.

Digital Angels was also able to demonstrate clearly that although handheld tablets can work well, they are not appropriate for all older people. They used larger tablets, large keyboards, flexible tablet holders and voice activated devices. They worked with specialist hearing and sight loss services to support those people who had a specific impairment. It became apparent that not all adaptations suited all activity; for example an Echo dot, helped people access the internet for pleasure, but wasn't suitable for form filling or accessing services. In addition, as people's confidence grew their needs and wishes evolved.





LS14 Trust, the Postcard Café and the Postcard Community

The LS14 Trust used the concept of the Post Crossing movement to work with residents of Seacroft (this involves using the internet to join a movement which then results in the exchange of real postcards from across the world). The residents were supported by a staff member with help from local volunteers. Since using Post Crossing to send and receive physical postcards to people across the world, residents have gone on to do a range of other activities. They have been able to Skype family members, book holidays online thus saving money, research their family trees and some have also gone on to trial using the internet in their own homes.

As part of the Postcard Café project the LS14 Trust came to the realisation that they could not run the large, relaxed and informal groups they had envisaged. When setting up the Postcard Community they moved towards personalised support for individuals or in pairs.

“This has helped to inform our planning as the project has progressed. We now ensure that we plan a set of simple ideas but allow time for more co-production during the sessions. Going off on a tangent often provides the most rewarding part of the sessions for participants.”

Time to Shine projects who used digital technology alongside as part of other activities

These projects received support from 100% Digital Leeds, a project set up by Leeds City Council to get residents on-line. They have a bank of 4G enabled tablets to loan and are able to offer training to volunteers who want to become champions. Although this scheme was unrelated to the Time to Shine programme, they enabled the following Time to Shine projects to experiment with digital activities:

Bee Together, working with adults with a learning disability, tried running a small virtual group using Zoom. (Zoom is an app that can be used to talk on-line without mobile numbers). This was planned to give people a chance to chat over a subject they were all interested in (in this case knitting) without having to go out again to meet each other in the evening. It can be hard for adults with learning disabilities to start a chat so the worker identified it would be easier to form a group around a mutual interest.

In common with the other projects it required a lot of one-to-one input at the start to assess people's abilities and give them the training they needed, and some individuals needed continued support.

“Some staff were working with up to four people, which meant a division of their time. This led to logging on at different times and therefore not able to chat with others in the group.”

Although the idea was popular with most of the participants, because individuals were only able to use the technology with one-to-one support it has not been sustainable.

Carers Connections, supporting carers, made good use of the 100% Digital Leeds tablet loan scheme to try out activities and the project has supported individuals in a range of ways. They have also set up an IT class looking at a range of subjects and raised money to buy tablets that they can loan out to members in the future.

“ A bereaved carer was supported to use email and skype to contact his children, and a granddaughter in Canada. He also hopes to make contact with a sister in Australia. He was also able to use the internet to find local activities and had attended a local crown green bowling club.

A carer's wife was stuck in one room upstairs in their home, her carer had epilepsy but had to risk the stairs to look after his wife. They were financially digitally excluded but are now able to borrow a tablet. As a result they have been able to bid for local authority properties so they can move to a bungalow, the lady is able to watch soaps that she was missing due to being stuck alone in an upstairs room, they play games together on the tablet, the carer is reminiscing listening to 1930s cowboy western music, and they are both able to skype their children in Ireland to keep their social connection going ”

Alexa speaker

Don't Call Me Old, working with younger older people, was quick to take advantage of the 100% Digital Leeds tablet loan scheme, and the training programme for Digital Champions; a number of their volunteers received the training. This experience then led them to work with the local authority housing team to help others get online.

“Tenant engagement officers for the West district approached us to run a six-month pilot to give people a basic computer platform that will allow them to do a number of tasks easily and in a safe environment. We will use the Learn My Way system to show people how to order shopping online, online banking and how to keep safe on the internet.”

Cara 2, working with older people in care homes and retirement housing schemes, experimented with the use of 100% Digital Leeds iPads. They found they could be very effective tools for engaging individuals in conversation, and that anxieties around their use quickly disappeared. However, they worked well as tools for one-to-one conversation rather than group work.

“She did not want to use the iPad herself, just watch me do so, as she became more and more engrossed in the subject matter she wanted to carry out internet searches herself and was happy to take the iPad from me and do so. This seemed to happen quite naturally, and D's confidence and interest seemed to grow throughout. I also noticed that the discussion I was having with D was the longest and most intense I had ever known her to have while taking part in any of the sessions we had done at the care home.”



Adapting to Covid-19 and the local response

From almost as soon as lockdown started it became apparent that being online was going to be important for all of us. In Leeds attempts were made to reduce the digital divide by a number of organisations.

Local organisations moved to online activity for at least some of their members, setting up meetings and coffee mornings, 'closed' Facebook groups, and 'show and tell' sessions. Time to Shine set up online meetings for staff; this helped delivery partners to share ideas and good practice quickly.

Delivery partners also started helping their members to get online in a variety of ways. Carers Leeds had already been working with individuals to help them get online. They invested in more 4G enabled devices and delivered them to people in their homes after setting them up. They provided tablets and voice operated devices (like the Echo Dot) and supported people with instructions over the phone. Their early success gave staff from other organisations encouragement to do the same thing quickly.

100% Digital Leeds was quick to see how important digital communications would be. They had previously identified the importance of local organisations in supporting older people to get online and stepped up their loan scheme and quickly put their digital champion training online. Through their partnership with the Good Things Foundations they also enabled organisations to access emergency funding to purchase equipment to loan to their own members.

They continued to work with older people's organisations to train staff and volunteers to act as digital champions, online and face to face as soon as socially distanced training was possible.

Some key points emerged:

- **Using lockdown to promote engagement.** It has long been recognised that the key to engaging people with digital technology is a need or want of some sort. Organisations wanted to be able to take advantage of this extra level of motivation, especially once they were able to visit people more easily to help them through the initial steps, albeit on the doorstep.
- **For those with no pre-existing knowledge it was a slow task.** It took a long time to get people online one at a time, but it was worth it. Simply sending people instructions without one-to-one telephone support afterwards meant they might not make it. It was worth committing the time to engage each person in turn.
- **These new skills will have positive benefits past lockdown.** Many of those who have started to use zoom, or email, or who have been meeting new groups on line have realised it will be a lifeline over the winter. This applies to winter 20/21, as it looks like groups will not be able to meet face-to-face, but also in the future as they will be able to 'meet' friends much more easily without needing to travel at night.

There are still big issues to tackle around the digital divide, around financial access to equipment and data, which are being tackled by organisations outside our programme. However, for many older people's organisations it looks like 'blended delivery' is here to stay.

What do you need to do?

- The three Rs - **Relevance, Reminders and Repetition**. You must be helping someone to do something they want to do (Relevance), let them do it themselves and write lots of notes (Reminders) and just keep doing it again, and again (Repetition). It generally takes people a while to get the hang of things.
- Find the hook - one member decided to get to grips with the digital world as without it he could no longer find out when fishing meetups were held.
- Go straight to the hook and get them using it before you take them back to the beginning. All those little steps can be quite overwhelming, so it helps if they have experienced the positive benefits before learning to work the device from scratch.
- Ask what people want before you start - a Neighbourhood Network held a comprehensive survey at a launch event and used the results to guide the subjects they covered on courses.
- Address digital safety - it was often a concern for people which could be used as a hook to get people started.
- If you do run courses, set up training in cohorts if you can. People like to learn together, and more social interaction happens as a result.
- For group work use multiplayer games and activities that people can do in pairs, you don't want to end up with a room full of silver surfers, each on a separate device in a different game.
- Make sure Wi-Fi is available or use 4G-enabled equipment. People need the means to practice to help them embed skills but may not want or be able to pay for internet access initially .
- If you have a loan scheme you will need to provide a range of equipment, there is no one size fits all, and an individual may need something different as they progress.

What should you avoid?

- Don't try to involve people by cold-advertising digital skills 'courses'; they will work for some people but many do not find it motivating. Courses work better if you can co-design them.
- Don't interrupt their normal activity, organisations found they needed to run separate sessions rather than piggybacking onto usual activities.
- Don't rush things.
- Don't assume people are not interested, sometimes they just lack the means, sometimes they are frightened.

Resources

[Digital Angels Report](#)

[Reducing loneliness through digital connections: Case study of the Digital Angels project](#)

[100% Digital Leeds](#)

[Good things Foundation](#)